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***Archaeology of Aboriginal Culture Change in the Interior
Southeast: Depopulation during the Early Historic Period***
by
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BOOK REVIEWS

Archaeology of Aboriginal Culture Change in the Interior Southeast: Depopulation during the Early Historic Period. By Marvin T. Smith. Gainesville, Florida, 1987. University Presses of Florida. Pp. xiii, 185. Illustrations. Tables. Appendices. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$20.00

We now just begin to realize the enormous cultural and physical devastation begun when the first Spaniard stepped off a ship into the aboriginal southeastern U.S. in the sixteenth century. Far more than firearms or swords, the inadvertent (at first) action of biological weapons, Old World diseases, caused immediate depopulation and social collapse in coastal areas and other places where natives underwent direct contact with the newcomers. But the effects of contact traveled much farther than did the Europeans themselves.

This excellent book is a well-reasoned reconstruction of what happened to native populations in the interior Southeast, where there was little early direct interaction between European and Indian and, thus, few written records. Archaeology is the method for examining the unrecorded past. Marvin Smith uses the minutiae of the archaeological record to demonstrate the tremendous population collapse and sociopolitical reorganization resulting not from acculturation to European ways but from this indirect contact in a portion of the interior Southeast, including the Georgia-Alabama piedmont and the Ridge and Valley province of Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama. He combines fascinating detail from both well-known and obscure historical documents with specifics of artifact assemblages, and he also includes handsome maps, tables and photos of burials and high status artifacts.

Though Europeans did not make it into this study area, their material culture did. Stylistic change in European trade goods can place different sites accurately in time during the early historic period; thus, culture change can be examined. The premise is that the once complex, powerful native chiefdoms collapsed very soon after contact because of drastic depopulation from disease. Specific data are applied to test Smith's hypotheses. Diseases such as smallpox do not show up on the skeleton, but some bones show wounds from metal weapons, and mass graves suggest sudden deaths of many from epidemics. Site sizes and numbers both decline through time, suggesting diminished populations. There are also signs of massive population movements.

Evidence of population decline is indirect, but the data more clearly demonstrate political breakdown. Building of mounds, defensive palisades and ditches abruptly ceases by about 1630, suggesting the decline of a centrally organized labor force. Native settlement hierarchies, including a range from multi-mound centers to single mounds/villages to small hamlets, give way in the seventeenth century to a pattern of only smaller habitation sites. Earlier historic graves with European artifacts are those of elites; later such objects are more widespread, suggesting breakdown of the social hierarchy.

Smith shows these changes are not from acculturation or direct contact, which would have left traces of European animals, plants and Christian practices. Historical evidence and a few items (such as a Dutch glass bead) clearly from northern native groups fleeing contact indicate the pressures of war, firearms and the slave trade, indirect means for what Smith calls “deculturation.” By the early eighteenth century small remnant groups with severely altered aboriginal culture and vastly simplified sociopolitical organization had to band together for defense, and they evolved into the historic Creek Confederacy.

Lately there is intensive research on the de Soto entrada and its effects, especially on Florida and the massive culture change from succeeding centuries of the Spanish presence. I hope Smith’s fine study will encourage other such work in areas such as northwest Florida or southwest Georgia, where contact was not direct but still devastating. The lessons to be learned are invaluable; such situations continue to occur, as in the Amazon basin of this century.

Nancy M. White

The Nature of Things on Sanibel. By George R. Campbell. Introduction by Cleveland Amory. Sarasota, Florida, 1988. Pineapple Press. Revised edition. Pp. xvi, 174. Illustrations. Appendices. Index. Paper. \$14.95.

It is a pleasure to read again this charming and provocative book by a person who has long been a student of the natural history of southwestern Florida and of Sanibel Island. More than a student, George Campbell has also been an advocate for wildlife and has led the fight to protect and save our endangered species, especially the alligator.

Over a period of several years, much of the substance of this book appeared as thoughtful and thought-provoking articles in the *Island Reporter*, a venerable (for us) Sanibel newspaper. Assembled and edited for this book, they form a body of information that is fundamental for appraising the circumstances and modern history of our endangered wildlife. Twenty-five chapters, averaging about six pages each with illustrations, discuss most of the significant mammals (e.g., panther, marsh rabbit, otter, dolphins), many birds of surpassing interest (e.g., ospreys, egrets, spoonbills), shell species, fish (sharks and rays) and, of course, reptiles and amphibians. Two chapters are devoted to edible and poisonous plants. Within the chapters, checklists are provided for snakes, lizards and turtles. Virtually every chapter includes excellent and sensitive drawings by Molly Eckler Brown. Especially significant points are also illustrated with photographs.

The book is rounded with a brief discussion of “Man, the endangering species,” with a checklist of the mammals of Sanibel, an extensive index, a map of the island showing its preserves and roads, and two opposite appendices having to do with special rules and laws. The mammal checklist is of special interest because many of the species have accompanying arrows that indicate by their slants the author’s opinion of whether the animal is increasing, holding its own, or decreasing. Of the thirty-two species so rated, only ten are shown holding their own or increasing, one of which is *Homo sapiens*, who, appropriately, rates an extra-heavy arrow!